



Ernest Hugh Hamilton
(courtesy John Hamilton)

Hamilton, Ernest Hugh (1871-1928) was born at Melbourne in 1871. His parents were Daniel Hamilton, a clerk born in Scotland, and Agnes Cochrane. Ernest had five brothers and six sisters, and was the ninth of the twelve children. Hamilton was one of a number of architects who left the Eastern States in the early 1890s during a period of economic depression, and came to Western Australia seeking to enjoy better conditions during the gold boom and period of building expansion. He married Margaret ‘Maggie’ Costello at Perth in 1894, and they were blessed with at least three children: Mabel Elsie (1894), Bessie Ida (1896), and John ‘Jack’ Ernest (1898).

Information from official records and Hamilton’s descendants reveal that he was appointed a draughtsman in the Western Australian Public Works Department in August 1892 and employed on the preparation of architectural contract drawings. His signature occurs on drawings for Guildford Courthouse, fittings, October 1894 and the Government Offices, furniture and fittings, January 1895. In 1897 he was commended to the Under Secretary for Public Works for his design work in connection with Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee casket (containing an address to the Queen from the WA Houses of Parliament), and recommended for a substantial bonus in recognition of his exhaustive efforts. His signature also appears on drawings for the Perth Secondary School (Modern School) in 1909.

By 1910 Hamilton was listed as a temporary draftsman of the Public Works Department, and it is likely that he was employed in various government projects in the following decade, although this has not been confirmed. Ernest’s son Jack served with the Australian Army on the ‘Western Front’ during the First World War, and was fortunate to be one of those who returned home to family in 1919.

The *Architects Act of Western Australia 1921* received formal assent in 1922, and Hamilton duly registered with the Architects Board of WA that year, when he first appears in the

directories as an independent architect. Hamilton was listed as an Associate of the Royal Institute of the Architects of Western Australia in 1923. The foundation stone at St Mary's Church, Leederville of 1923 records Hamilton as the architect. His name and address, 130 Harold Street, Perth is on the only recovered drawing of the original portion of the Church. Oral history from members of the Hamilton family records that Hamilton designed the Capitol Theatre, Perth and the memorial clock tower at Subiaco. The Fallen Soldiers' Memorial at the corner of Rokeby and Hamersley Roads, Subiaco commemorates lives lost during war. The foundation stone of the memorial was laid in December 1922 and it was opened on 25 November 1923. The design was the subject of an architectural competition, which attracted thirty five entries, and Hamilton was the winner of the £25 premium.

The Capitol Theatre once stood in the lower end of William Street and an upper floor formed part of the Embassy Ballroom, but it was demolished in 1967. It is possible that Hamilton was employed by the firm Poole and Mouritzen who are recognised as the architects for the theatre, completed in 1929 - after Hamilton's death.

Later known as 'Snowy' Hamilton, perhaps in part mimicking the name of a well-known footballer of the 1920s, Ernest died on 26 June 1928 after falling into the Swan River:

FALL INTO RIVER - Architect's Sudden Death

Falling into the river from the Barrack-street jetty yesterday morning, Ernest Hugh Hamilton, a city architect was retrieved within a few minutes, but he died before he could be admitted to hospital. ... Hamilton, it was stated, was subject to fits, during which he was not conscious of his surroundings, and he probably had a seizure at the water's edge. He was a very able architect and draughtsman, and designed among other thing, the cloth [sic] tower war memorial at Subiaco. He resided with his wife in Harold Street, Highgate Hill.

Hamilton's grand-daughter recalled that on the day of his death Ernest was racing over to South Perth to investigate a garage being built on a block which bordered his own block at 1 Alexandra Street South Perth. Apparently the garage was to be built at a house owned by fellow architect Ken Duncan.

Eulogistic notes follow from an article (of unknown source) held by family descendants:

Those who knew the late architect 'Snowy' Hamilton will recall him as one of the cheeriest bohemians and open-hearted men of the metropolis. Gifted with a magnificent physique, a full manly strength which he never abused, a happy, care-free disposition, and an extraordinarily even temper, he made his work a pastime and his pastime became infectious to all around him. A gifted man in architectural science, and with a love of the proportionately beautiful, early in life he became proficient at his profession, and did a tremendous lot of work in Perth for which he was not over-paid, and for which many prominent men got the praise and credit. ...

References:

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Archival material from the Hamilton family - copy in John Taylor Architect file 001/98; 'The Western Australian Casket', *The Architect & Contract Reporter* supplement, 2 July 1897, pp.26-7; 'The West Australian Jubilee Casket', *The Builder*, 3 July 1897, pp.4-5 (Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee casket).

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HAMILTON John Ernest: Service Number - 14495 : Place of Birth - Perth WA : Place of Enlistment - Perth WA: Next of Kin - (Father) HAMILTON Ernest Hugh. National Archives of Australia, series B2455, item barcode 4265642.

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Pitt Morison, M. and White, J. (Eds.), *Western Towns and Buildings*, UWA Press, Nedlands, 1979, pp.127-8 (Capitol Theatre, Perth).

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St Mary's Church, Leederville (HCWA Pic562);



Fallen Soldiers Memorial, Subiaco (HCWA Pic4070)